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Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)

Contents

Agenda item 105: Advancement of women (*continued*)

Agenda item 106: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 105: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/52/3, A/52/38/Rev.1, A/52/44-S/1997/775, A/52/116-S/1997/317, A/52/300, A/52/326, A/52/337, A/52/352, A/52/355, A/52/356, A/52/408 and A/52/460)

Agenda item 106: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) A/52/113-E/1997/18, A/52/281, A/52/447-S/1997/775 and A/52/460)

1. **Mr. Naber** (Jordan) said that his Government was continuing its efforts to promote education and training for young women. The female illiteracy rate had dropped from 49.5 per cent in 1979 to 22 per cent in 1991, and the percentage of women in the workforce had risen from 1 per cent in 1961 to 16 per cent in 1996, in spite of the economic recession. His Government was also endeavouring to improve health services for women, particularly by making maternity care more widely available. As a result, maternal mortality rates had decreased substantially (from 150 deaths per 10,000 deliveries in 1970 to 60 deaths per 10,000 births in 1990), and women's life expectancy had risen.

2. Significant progress had also been made in the legislative field; amendments stressing the principles of equality between the sexes and non-discrimination had been made to various laws, in accordance with the Constitution, the National Charter and the international conventions ratified by his country, and with other legislation in force.

3. In order to optimize the participation of women in the economic, social and political spheres, the Council of Ministers in October 1996 had assigned a leading role to the Jordanian National Committee for Women in the promotion and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. That process would be facilitated by the democratization of the country and by the Beijing Conference, which had created an environment conducive both to legislative reforms and to practical improvements in the lives of women.

4. **Mr. Heng** (Singapore) said that while States were unanimous in condemning violence against women migrant workers, they did not all agree on the approach to be taken to combat it. He hoped that the draft resolution on the item would be adopted by consensus; that would be possible only if it stressed the responsibilities of both the receiving and the sending States and the benefits which the latter derived from the employment of women migrant workers.

5. The report of the Secretary-General on violence against women migrant workers (A/52/356) provided an objective basis for formulating a balanced text. As the issue was one that was "just emerging", hasty formulations that could be divisive should be avoided. The draft resolution should acknowledge the progress made by the numerous receiving States which had adopted measures to combat violence against women migrant workers.

6. Furthermore, the special rapporteurs and the human rights treaty monitoring bodies had specific mandates which the resolution could not expand; the treaty bodies could consider the issue of violence against women migrant workers only to the extent that it fell within the scope of their mandate. There was no need to invite the Commission on the Status of Women to address the issue specifically, as it already dealt with all forms of violence against women.

7. Lastly, given the diversity of the domestic situations and views of the receiving countries, it was impossible for the time being to develop universally applicable international norms. As at 14 October 1997, only nine countries had ratified or acceded to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; that showed that the vast majority of Member States were disinclined or unprepared to adopt a global approach to the problem.

8. His Government believed that the most effective way of combating violence against women migrant workers was through the national approach. To that end, it had enacted legal and administrative measures to protect all categories of workers, male and female, and did not hesitate to punish employers who mistreated their foreign household workers. His country ranked first in Asia in terms of the fair administration of justice. Moreover, the Ministry of Labour had a Foreign Workers Unit to assist such workers in settling disputes with their employers. To date, all the disputes referred to the Foreign Workers Unit — of which there were few, since his Government saw to it that the labour laws were enforced — had been settled satisfactorily.

9. In addition, employers were now required to provide accident insurance for their foreign household workers.

10. Lastly, he reaffirmed the importance which he attached to the issue of violence against women migrant workers; he invited other members of the Committee to discuss it with him in detail, whether they shared his conviction that any draft resolution on the subject must be the result of compromise, or held divergent views.

11. **Ms. Gordon** (Jamaica) said that her Government's views on the two items under consideration would be expressed by the representative of the Bahamas, who would

speak on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and that she would limit herself to a few brief remarks.

12. Like other Caribbean countries, Jamaica had, over the years, made great progress in the defence of women's rights; much remained to be done, however, if it was to honour the commitments made at the Beijing Conference and the preceding conferences. Since the Beijing Conference in 1995, her Government had, in the context of the national platform for action, concentrated on a number of the critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action (alleviating poverty, education and training, eradication of violence against women and children and promoting equality in power-sharing and decision-making at all levels). During 1996 and 1997, the Bureau of Women's Affairs (the lead agency responsible for the follow-up process) had focused on strengthening its own structure and that of the mechanisms to promote the advancement of women and on raising public awareness of gender issues in cooperation with several non-governmental organizations and international organizations, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It had thus organized workshops and seminars for household workers, their employers and justice system personnel, and had carried out education and training programmes geared to pupils, students, communities, churches and non-governmental organizations.

13. Her Government had also made progress in the legislative field by adopting the Domestic Violence Act, reviewing the Offences Against the Person Act and initiating a law on sexual harassment.

14. She had taken note of the report of the Secretary-General on violence against women migrant workers (A/52/356). In view of the lack of documentation on the issue - due, in part, to the non-documentation of many female migrant workers - it was difficult to address it thoroughly; nevertheless, she agreed with the Secretary-General that the issue was emerging as a serious concern which would need to be addressed once additional data became available. In the meantime, States should continue to study and exchange information on the subject.

15. With regard to migrant workers, her country was both a sending and a receiving State. The number of migrant workers in Jamaica was extremely small, and they did not constitute a particularly vulnerable population, since the laws designed to protect the basic rights of Jamaican citizens applied to them as well. Among Jamaicans working overseas, however, a growing proportion were women. Most of them worked on a seasonal basis in the United States hotel industry; the Minister of Labour and her technical advisers made annual visits to the sites where they were employed to gather information on their working conditions.

16. **Mr. Warobi** (Kenya) said that his delegation associated itself with the views expressed by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on the two agenda items before the Committee, but wished to highlight some issues of particular concern to his country.

17. Since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action could be successfully implemented only if Governments had access to substantial additional financial resources, Kenya called on the developed countries to honour their commitment to contribute 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to the developing countries and an additional 0.15 per cent to the least developed countries.

18. Kenya attached great significance to the Economic and Social Council's agreed conclusions on mainstreaming gender perspective in all polices and programmes in the United Nations system. He noted the progress made in that area and supported the Council's recommendation that the General Assembly should instruct all its Main Committees and bodies to systematically mainstream gender perspective in all areas of their work. He emphasized the need to further strengthen the role of the Commission on the Status of Women in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and in its capacity as adviser to the Economic and Social Council.

19. Kenya commended the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on its activities to promote the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and for the funding it supplied to developing countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa. He believed that one of the best ways to help women in developing countries was to strengthen the operational activities of UNIFEM, and therefore called upon the international community to increase its financial support to the Fund.

20. Kenya welcomed the measures being undertaken by the Secretary-General in order to achieve gender parity in the Secretariat by the year 2000, but urged that the recruitment of women in the Professional category should be undertaken in conformity with the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

21. Kenya was currently carrying out a national plan to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. In collaboration with UNIFEM, it would launch a national initiative designed to facilitate those efforts. Furthermore, it was currently finalizing a policy framework for mainstreaming gender perspective in development sectors, and was monitoring and

evaluating the mainstreaming of gender perspective on an ongoing basis in all fields and at all levels. The database on the status of men and women in Kenya was being updated and a new edition would be reissued in 1998, and a training manual had been developed to assist in incorporating the gender perspective in district planning and programmes. With regard to education, a special task force on gender and education had been established, and in the area of women's economic empowerment, a women's development programme, developed under the National Poverty Eradication Plan, had established a national fund for women which would enhance women's access to credit.

22. **Ms. Edwards** (Marshall Islands) said that during the past half century the women of her country, once deprived of education and relegated to traditional roles in the family and community, had proved that they had an essential role to play in protecting the environment and establishing a prosperous society. However, as was the case in other developing countries in the region, their health left much to be desired. Women's cancers were common and an increasing number of young mothers suffered from cancers that could be linked to non-naturally occurring forms of radiation. Women, especially mothers, were respected, but for cultural reasons they were reluctant to talk about their personal health, particularly when problems related to childbirth or cancer of the reproductive organs were involved.

23. Anxious to ensure that their children, male and female, would have a better future, Marshallese women would need capital in order to undertake income-generating activities. However, the majority had little education and had difficulty in understanding the procedures necessary for obtaining credit. Since 1982, they had been helped by a women's credit cooperative.

24. Significant progress had been made. The Constitution recognized the equal rights of men and women. The Marshall Islands National Council for Women, inspired by National Policy for the Development of Women, was responsible for the coordination and implementation of all women-related activities. There were 170 recognized women's groups which made a significant contribution to the economy and welfare of the local community through their fund-raising activities. The Women's Athletic Club was currently raising funds for the purchase of equipment which would enable Marshall Islands women to have mammographies for the first time. Other groups provided financial support for religious, athletic, educational and health activities, and assistance in cases of natural disaster.

25. The National Council for Women monitored the institutional constraints on the advancement of women and regularly organized training in income-generating activities for women's groups. The contribution of women to the economy was immeasurable. Due to the success of community-based programmes, an increasing number of Marshallese women were obtaining scholarships for study in foreign universities.

26. The Council had been quick to organize retraining and counselling activities to assist women affected by recent economic changes. A new group had also been formed to make women more aware of the workings of politics and instruct them in how to exercise their rights and powers.

27. In the late 1980s, a woman had been elected to the national parliament for the first time, and had subsequently served as a member of the President's Cabinet. Increasing numbers of women were represented on municipal councils and in mayoral posts.

28. Nevertheless, several problems affected women's ability to make changes in Marshallese society, including lack of technical skills, difficulty in making men understand the importance of family planning to the health of women and the family and insufficient collaboration between the Government and women's non-governmental organizations.

29. The Marshall Islands continued to cooperate with various organizations such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNDP, UNICEF, ILO, ESCAP, the South Pacific Commission and the South Pacific Forum, and had received assistance from Australia, New Zealand and the United States in order to continue to improve conditions for women.

30. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh), recalling the commitments made at the Beijing Conference, commended the United Nations system for its work on the mainstreaming of the gender perspective and the Economic and Social Council for introducing guidelines to that end at its substantive session in July 1997. National Governments should play their part in that process and concrete steps should be taken to fulfil the commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action.

31. While his delegation welcomed the appointment of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and other recent appointments of women to high-level posts, much remained to be done to achieve gender parity in the Organization and the mechanisms for the advancement of women in the Secretariat and in the regional commissions should be strengthened. His delegation would appreciate more details about what the United Nations was

doing to support national efforts for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Specific proposals and recommendations had been addressed to bilateral and multilateral financial partners to secure the support which developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, so badly needed.

32. Bangladesh had fairly well-developed mechanisms for the advancement of women. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs had been designated to coordinate follow-up to and implementation of the Platform for Action. There was also the National Council for Women's Development, headed by the Prime Minister. A National Plan of Action had been formulated by an Inter-Ministerial Task Force, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, research organizations and the private sector, in order to increase women's participation in all development activities and in the decision-making process at all levels.

33. Legislative measures had been adopted to promote women's human rights and combat discrimination and violence against women. Those measures included quotas for women in the National Parliament and civil service, stipends and campaigns to combat illiteracy and high drop-out rates among school girls, regulation of the minimum age for marriage, prohibition of dowries, and punishment of dowry-related violence, trafficking in women and children and violence against women. Following its commitments at Beijing, Bangladesh had announced the withdrawal of its reservations to articles 13 (a) and 16 (1) (f) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. On International Women's Day, the Prime Minister had announced a national policy for the advancement of women. The Platform for Action had been translated into the national language and had been widely disseminated.

34. Bangladesh had played a pioneering role in addressing the feminization of poverty, by promoting development-oriented initiatives and the economic empowerment of women through innovative microcredit programmes such as the Grameen Bank, self-employment opportunities and educational and training programmes. The benefits of microcredit schemes with regard to empowerment of the poor, income generation and creation of self-employment opportunities had been highlighted by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Improvement of the situation of women in the rural areas" (A/52/326) and by the Microcredit Summit, held in Washington in February, which had been co-chaired by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. It was vital that more support was given at the national and international levels, particularly by the United Nations system, to microcredit institutions and programmes.

35. The empowerment of women had borne fruit: two women in succession had been appointed Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Bangladesh and the phenomenal turnout of Bangladeshi women at the 1996 elections had testified to their growing political strength. Bangladesh's Constitution and the quotas in national and local bodies had greatly improved women's political participation and empowerment.

36. Despite those achievements, Bangladesh required more effective cooperation from the international community. Nothing could stop the momentum generated at Beijing, and Bangladesh would continue to be a willing partner in international efforts for the advancement of women.

37. **Ms. Šimonović** (Croatia), recalling that *de jure* equality was a prerequisite for de facto equality, said that gender equality was laid down in the Croatian Constitution and that Croatia had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Croatia had presented its initial report for consideration by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in January 1998, and the special report which the Committee had requested on the suffering of women during the war in Croatia. Pursuant to article 143 of the Croatian Constitution, the Convention was directly applicable and had higher legal status than national laws.

38. More than 700 new laws had been adopted as part of Croatia's legislative reforms after the adoption of the Constitution in December 1990, including laws on the family, family planning, abortion and assisted conception. Croatia had recently ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Women's equal rights were further guaranteed by national legislation and the human rights treaties to which Croatia was a party.

39. Equality had become a fact of life in Croatia, whether in education or in employment opportunities. However, the number of women holding senior political positions was surprisingly small and was even lower than before the transition to democracy and a market economy. The Subregional Conference on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Central and Eastern Europe, held in Bucharest in 1996, had highlighted the backward trend in the Subregion. However, there were some signs of change: while Croatia had only one woman minister, its Deputy Prime Minister was a woman and women accounted for 20 per cent of all deputy ministers, assistant ministers and governmental office heads. Growing numbers of non-governmental organizations contributed to the advancement of women through their work with refugees, displaced

women and missing persons and on problems of equality and advancement of women.

40. In some countries of central and eastern Europe, the democratization process had been hindered by armed conflict that had resulted in grave violations of human rights. That had been the case in Croatia, where war had posed a number of specific problems for women, which should be addressed in the national plan for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Croatian Government had established an inter-ministerial National Commission for Equality, in May 1996, whose task was to promote the advancement of women and propose a strategy for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In cooperation with the Council of Europe, the Commission had organized two seminars. A draft national plan had been submitted to non-governmental organizations for their comments and was to be submitted to the Government in November 1997.

41. She emphasized the importance of the issues of women's reproductive rights. Different methods of medically assisted procreation had been developed to treat infertility, usually in developed countries. In 1996 the Council of Europe had adopted a Convention on human rights and biomedicine and was currently preparing an additional protocol to prohibit the cloning of human beings. Her delegation suggested that the Committee and other United Nations bodies dealing with human rights and women's rights should start considering such new methods of medically assisted procreation and their impact on reproductive rights and women's rights in general.

42. Croatia had finally reached the level of peace, stability and security that allowed it to devote more of its resources and energies to social development and the protection of human rights. The advancement of women was one of the areas to which it would give increased attention.

43. **Ms. Wensley** (Australia) said that one of the four critical areas of concern at the 1997 session of the Commission on the Status of Women had been women in power and decision-making; violence against women would be a key theme at the Commission's forty-second session. The two themes were given high priority in the Australian National Plan of Action for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

44. After signing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1980 and ratifying it in 1983, Australia had adopted a wide range of legislative measures, strategies and programmes to assist women. Women had attained formal legal equality with men through an amendment of anti-discrimination legislation established in 1995.

45. Advisory bodies and machinery to evaluate the outcomes for women of government policies and programmes had been set up at federal, state and Territory levels. A new body, the Commonwealth/State and Territories Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women met annually.

46. Greater participation by women in politics at the state and federal levels was a priority. Following the federal elections of 1996, the percentage of women in the Australian parliament had increased by 6 per cent to 21 per cent, as against the international average of 11 per cent.

47. In 1996, the first woman President of the Senate had been elected and, in 1997, the Vice-President of the Senate was also a woman. There were also four women ministers and a Minister for the Status of Women.

48. The proportion of state and Territory female parliamentarians had increased, too, from 9 per cent in 1985 to 17 per cent in 1995, while in local government women's representation had increased to 25 per cent in 1996 from 13 per cent in 1986.

49. At the United Nations, which should set an example in drawing on the best expertise and talents of both men and women, the "glass ceiling" continued to prevent women reaching senior decision-making positions. As the Secretary-General's report on the status of women in the Secretariat (A/52/408) had recognized, women held less than a tenth of posts at the level of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General. Australia applauded the Secretary-General's commitment to the achievement of gender equality in the Secretariat by the year 2000.

50. Of the 20 special representatives, personal representatives or special envoys, none was a woman. Her delegation looked forward to early progress on the issue.

51. Australia had been involved for many years in the struggle against domestic violence, having actively participated in the development of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and hoped that the Assistant Secretary-General's energies would be directed at mobilizing the international community to advance on that front.

52. Australia recognized that domestic violence was an issue not just for women but for the whole community. Despite the progress made over the past 20 years in providing support for women subjected to domestic violence and ensuring a strong criminal justice response, such violence persisted. Preventive action should be taken more systematically. To that end, a national domestic violence

summit was to be convened in November 1997 to develop a national strategy to prevent and respond to domestic violence and to facilitate national approaches to law reform, research, data collection and community education.

53. Australia was taking action to consolidate and increase the gains already made and to achieve the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. It hoped that its experience would be of interest to other countries.

54. **Mr. Ahmad** (Malaysia) said that, although the progress achieved in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action was encouraging, globalization and liberalization, while increasing the opportunities for growth, did not automatically bring equal growth and development to all countries or all sections of society. The feminization of poverty remained a global phenomenon: of the 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty, 70 per cent were women. No effort should be spared to create an international economic environment conducive to the empowerment of women.

55. His delegation was encouraged at the outcome of the Microcredit Summit and applauded the initiatives taken by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies in mobilizing billions of dollars to provide loans to the poorest families, especially women. Microcredit provided women with exposure to legal literacy, commercial know-how, and participation in decision-making. Malaysia, which was the headquarters for the secretariat of the Regional Steering Committee on the Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women for Asia and the Pacific, would further encourage the development of regional and subregional activities such as training, research, exchange of information and literacy.

56. His Government was committed to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, especially with regard to poverty, education, health, violence against women and the participation of women in decision-making and economic development, and in July 1996, had adopted a National Plan of Action reflecting its awareness of the need for a fundamental shift in development policies to address the realities of women's lives. If women were not given the possibility of acquiring skills and keeping pace with changing technology, they would not benefit at all from economic growth.

57. His Government intended to withdraw a number of the reservations which had accompanied its ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Its first report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was being prepared.

58. The elimination of violence against women was one of the 12 strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. Taking note of the report by the Secretary-General on violence against women migrant workers (A/52/356), he stressed the importance of cooperation between the sending and receiving countries in order to improve the recruitment and the living and working conditions of women migrants.

59. His Government, which had passed a Domestic Violence Act in 1994, was supportive of all measures and resolutions to protect women against rape and other abuses. In 1993, it had set up one-stop centres to provide help and counselling to victims. It was concerned at the upsurge in trafficking in women and girls, forced labour, pornography and sex tourism, and welcomed the efforts of the international community to combat those evils.

60. **Ms. Boyco** (Ukraine) welcomed the appointment of Mrs. Mary Robinson as High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was an example of the growing participation of women in high-level decision-making.

61. While she was convinced that the women recently appointed to high positions, including, in the case of Ukraine, those of Minister of Justice and Minister for Family and Youth Affairs, owed their appointments to their professionalism rather than their sex, she had doubts about whether the indiscriminate application of the principle of systematic gender balancing was justified.

62. The image of the woman sacrificing her life entirely to her children and family was still too widespread. Many women continued to think in that way, and it was necessary to ensure that each woman could exercise her freedom of choice and fulfil her own ambitions. However, society as a whole needed to drastically change its attitude and cultural behaviour towards women, in particular by ceasing to see them as a group that was different from the rest of society: they could aspire, like every human being, to exercise their basic human rights and freedoms. Most Governments already recognized that respect for human rights and the rights of women was a precondition for political stability and economic and social development.

63. New, more effective and more rational approaches to the advancement of women needed to be adopted. They should be based on partnership and better cooperation between international organizations, and, more specifically, between the agencies of the United Nations system and regional organizations, particularly the Council of Europe. Her delegation also wished to emphasize the importance of

the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the full implementation of which should be a priority, and supported the proposal to supplement it with an optional protocol. The current status of Ukrainian women reflected the transitional period the country was going through. The 1996 Constitution proclaimed the equal rights of men and women in all fields of public, political and cultural life. In the framework of the follow up to the Beijing Conference, a mechanism would shortly be set up to guarantee women's equal rights and opportunities. The Ministry for Family and Youth Affairs was responsible for, among other things, studying women's social status, working out proposals to improve it, and taking steps to protect the family and children. Relevant structures were being put in place throughout the country.

64. In accordance with the commitments it had made at the Fourth World Conference on Women, her Government had adopted two programmes, one on family planning and the other on children. A programme for the advancement of women was being prepared. In any case, for the Beijing Platform for Action to be effectively implemented in the countries in transition, international cooperation should be consolidated and the efforts of those countries supported, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 50/203 and 51/69 and the Platform for Action.

65. **Mr. Al-Humaimidi** (Iraq) said that pursuant to the Beijing Platform for Action, a national strategy for the advancement of Iraqi women, based on the Iraqi Constitution, the Islamic *Shariah* and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, had been submitted to the United Nations Secretariat in July 1997. The strategy was intended, among other things, to remedy the catastrophic effects on women of the total embargo imposed on Iraq, and detailed a plan of action up to the year 2005 to ensure the political, economic, social and cultural advancement of women, to protect them from violence and to achieve gender equality. Various steps had been taken by official institutions, as well as by community and professional organizations, to implement the strategy.

66. His Government, which had always recognized the essential role of women, was committed to nurturing their development and allowing them to enjoy all their rights. Iraqi women currently played a prominent role in the professional world and the number of women working, particularly those in positions of responsibility, had significantly increased. Public officials had the right to a year's paid maternity leave and could request leave to bring up their children. Day care centres and kindergartens had been set up in workplaces, as well as in many residential areas. Throughout Iraq, including the most remote areas, there were maternal and child welfare centres. The General Union of Iraqi Women had taken an active part in the work of the various international conferences on women that had taken place since 1975. Moreover, Iraq was party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and regularly submitted reports to the Committee set up in accordance with that instrument.

67. Unfortunately, the current difficulties, particularly the embargo which Iraq had been subjected to since August 1990, had had a serious impact on the status of Iraqi women, which had greatly deteriorated at the professional, intellectual, social and economic levels. Economic problems had forced a great many Iraqi women to give up their profession and devote themselves to housekeeping. The embargo had had even more serious effects on the physical and mental health of Iraqi women, who had borne the brunt of the shortage of food, medicines and other basic essentials. According to the latest statistics, 73.6 per cent of Iraqi women and 53.3 per cent of pregnant women were anaemic. The maternal mortality rate had risen from 26 to 120 deaths per 100,000 live births. The World Food Programme estimated that 4 million Iraqis, including 600,000 pregnant or breastfeeding women, were threatened with serious malnutrition. Such a situation ran counter to the resolutions of various international conferences on women, as well as to the Beijing Platform for Action, which had called for measures in accordance with international law to be adopted to alleviate the suffering which economic problems inflicted on women and children. His delegation therefore believed that the first step towards enabling Iraqi women to enjoy all their rights, resume their pioneering role and improve their lives would be to lift the embargo imposed on Iraq.

68. **Ms. Wha** (Republic of Korea) said she was pleased to note that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had held two sessions in the current year, rather than just one as in the past. Given the backlog in its review of national reports and the likelihood of a heavier workload, the Committee should continue to hold two sessions a year and States should ratify the necessary amendments to the Convention at the earliest possible date.

69. Her delegation expressed the hope that the working group drafting an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women would continue to make progress at the Commission's next session. She also welcomed the establishment of the UNIFEM Trust Fund to support national, regional and international initiatives to eliminate violence against women. As an initial contributor to the fund, her Government hoped

that it would contribute to raising global awareness. Eliminating violence against women was a long process. Indeed, it had taken women's movements decades to attain international recognition of such violence as a violation of human rights.

70. She recalled the resolution adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-first session concerning the trafficking of women and children and urged the international community to work together in exposing and remedying such blatant violations of human rights. She fully supported the draft international convention against transnational organized crime and the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

71. Her delegation welcomed the progress made following the Fourth World Conference on Women and the efforts under way in the United Nations to mainstream a gender perspective, although that process in no way reduced the importance of focal points for women. Efforts must be made to ensure that the advancement of women was not impeded by overall budget and personnel cutbacks.

72. She expressed the hope that, on the basis on the Agreed conclusions 1997/1 adopted earlier in the year by the Economic and Social Council, concrete measures would be taken to promote gender perspective mainstreaming at all levels and in all areas of the Organization's activities. She also looked forward to reaching agreement at the current session of the General Assembly on the timing and format of a meeting to undertake a comprehensive review of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

73. Much had been achieved in the Republic of Korea since the last session of the General Assembly. Under the Women's Development Act, which was the central element in the 10 policy priorities announced immediately following the Beijing Conference, the Ministry of Political Affairs had embarked on developing a five-year plan which would reflect a wide range of initiatives from all government ministries and local administrations and constituted a major step forward in mainstreaming a gender perspective at all levels. A variety of measures aimed at further empowering women economically had been adopted, including the provision of incentives to companies to rehire women seeking re-employment after giving birth and raising children. Since 1996, a "Business Women's Day" had been held on 6 July and an act had been passed on assistance to small businesses run by women. Finally, a regional workshop on women's unremunerated work had been held in Seoul in May in collaboration with UNDP.

74. **Ms. De Barish** (Costa Rica), referring to the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/52/281), recalled that her delegation had fully supported General Assembly resolution 51/69 of 12 December 1996. The international conferences on women which had been held since 1975 had been of the utmost importance and the time had come to move from words to actions and put the commitments made in Beijing 1995 into effect.

75. Her delegation associated itself with the statements made by the delegations of Paraguay (on behalf of the Rio Group) and Tanzania (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China). Efforts must be made to strengthen the role of the Commission on the Status of Women in ensuring the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Economic and Social Council should continue to coordinate activities and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective and ensure follow-up to the conclusions of other United Nations conferences and the worldwide observance of women's rights.

76. The mainstreaming of a gender perspective called for up-to-date and objective data. She congratulated INSTRAW on its work and noted that the Institute was unique within the United Nations system in focusing exclusively on the role of women in development. The results of its surveys could therefore be used in policy making and organizing training activities.

77. Costa Rica had adopted a number of measures to give effect to the commitments made in Beijing, including various programmes and strategies, such as the plan for equal opportunities for women, the national plan for the prevention of violence in the home and the programme for the promotion of the active participation of women in civic affairs. The percentage of women in government posts was rising, and the Division for the Advancement of Women (Ministry of Social Affairs) aimed to achieve parity.

78. In conclusion, she recalled the main objectives proclaimed in Beijing regarding the physical and mental health of women and paid tribute to the efforts of the World Health Organization (WHO). She also welcomed the results achieved by the National Centre for the Advancement of Women and the Family in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, and the support provided by the Inter-American Commission of Women and WHO.

79. **Ms. Manalo** (Philippines) said that issues relating to the advancement of women and the prevention of violence against women had always been priority concerns of the Philippines. However, despite the efforts of many countries, women migrant workers continued to be subjected to violence of all kinds, which underscored the importance of the resolutions on violence against women migrant workers

and traffic in women and girls. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report on violence against women migrant workers (A/52/356), there was a need to gather and analyse more information and data to adequately determine the extent of the problem as a basis for formulating policies and strategies. In that regard, it was also important to strengthen bilateral, regional and international cooperation.

80. Regarding trafficking in women and girls, priority should be given to the updating of the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others by including the concepts of forced marriage and forced labour and establishing a monitoring mechanism for the effective implementation of the Convention.

81. Her Government had taken various major strategic measures in order to implement the Beijing Platform for Action: the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development 1995-2025 had been adopted; an act had been promulgated directing all government agencies to allocate a minimum of 5 per cent of their total budget to women-related programmes and projects; institution-building mechanisms addressing women's concerns had been put in place; the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women had been strengthened in order to coordinate the efforts of the Government, private organizations and members of civil society, and a new law against rape had been enacted by the Philippine Congress and signed by the President.

82. While the Asia-Pacific region continued to lead the global economy, many women in rural areas continued to live in poverty. The Asia-Pacific Regional Steering Committee for the Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women, of which the Philippines was a member, had held a meeting on that issue in order to mobilize the resources necessary to finance microcredit programmes for poor rural women.

83. As part of Asia-Pacific economic cooperation, various measures had been taken to strengthen women's participation in development. The Philippines strongly believed that there was an equal role for women to play in the globalization process. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Ministerial Conference to be held in the Philippines in 1998 would aim to improve women's lives in order to favour prospects for equitable economic growth, the reduction of poverty and sustainable development.

84. The Philippines continued to support the measures taken by the United Nations system to address violence against female migrant workers, and paid particular tribute to the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund, ILO, and the International Organization for Migration for their work relating to female migrant workers and trafficking in girls.

85. While acknowledging the substantial action for the advancement of women and prevention of violence against female migrant workers taken by the United Nations system and a number of States, the Philippines wished to make four points. First, the United Nations human rights treaty monitoring bodies should include women's issues in their consideration of country reports and in making their recommendations. Second, regional initiatives should be encouraged. Third, non-conventional mechanisms could make recommendations. Fourth, on the eve of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and five years after the Vienna Conference, in the process of reviewing progress made in the field of human rights, it would be appropriate to re-examine the issue of the situation of female migrant workers.

86. All nations should turn the basic principle of equality of rights for men and women into a global reality, and social progress should benefit everyone, including women and young girls.

87. **Ms. Camerano** (Colombia) said that the Colombian Constitution considered the family as a pillar of society, and stipulated that both members of a married couple had the same rights and responsibilities and that each member of the family owed mutual respect to the other; any form of domestic violence was punishable under the law. The Constitution guaranteed special protection for women who were heads of families and several laws had been promulgated in 1996 in order to protect the victims of ill-treatment and guarantee the rights of women with regard to inheritance.

88. In its development plan, whose theme was "the social contract", her Government had put into effect a policy on equality for women. To that end, it had created a national department for equality which monitored the application of the relevant provisions of international agreements and whose principal duty was to promote the rights of women, increase their participation in economic and political affairs and protect them from violence. The Government had also adopted a policy for the equality and participation of women, whose objectives were to encourage cultural change which would upgrade the social role of women; the participation of women in the planning and management of the development policies, programmes and projects formulated

by all public and private bodies, and the equal participation of women and men in decision-making at the State level and in the organizations of civil society.

89. In 1994, an office for rural women had been set up in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in order to promote equality between the sexes in the rural sector. Since 1996, that office had concluded agreements with various public services in order to train rural women in management techniques. It was currently concerned with removing the social obstacles to the advancement of rural women and in implementing prevention strategies in situations of armed conflict. The office had produced information and consciousness-raising programmes on, *inter alia*, human rights, permanent observation in areas of conflict and inquiries into violations of the basic rights of rural women.

90. Colombia was well aware of the fundamental role played by women in social, cultural, economic and political change in the country, since women were responsible for three structural changes: demography was changing, women had entered the labour market, and women were present in increasing numbers in the educational system.

91. Her country, like many others, had implemented policies aimed at improving women's quality of life, but that was no cause for complacency. Her delegation urged all the women of the world to fight to achieve their aims and to promote respect for differences, provided the status of the individual was not thereby adversely affected.

92. **Ms. Chigaga** (Zambia), speaking on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) said that the members of the Community attached great importance to the Beijing Platform for Action, a major instrument for development in the subregion, and regretted the lack of political will to implement it.

93. Many initiatives had, nevertheless, been taken in southern Africa in order to implement the Platform for Action: a ministerial meeting, held in Gabarone (Botswana) on 12 August 1997, and attended by representatives from several international bodies, had culminated in the adoption of a SADC declaration on gender and development, in which Governments reaffirmed their commitment to the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, the African Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. They had also reaffirmed that gender equality was a fundamental human right, and that there should be closer regional cooperation. The Heads of State and Government felt that the integration of gender issues into the SADC programme of action and the community-building initiative were the keys to the sustainable development of the subregion.

94. The Heads of State and Government had endorsed a number of recommendations of the Council of Ministers, including the establishment of a policy and institutional framework to achieve gender equality; the establishment of a standing committee of ministers and an advisory committee; the establishment of gender focal points to ensure that gender was taken into account; and the establishment of a gender unit in the SADC secretariat.

95. The Heads of State and Government had committed themselves to a number of very important goals: to ensure the equal representation of women in decision-making in SADC member States and achieve a target of at least 30 per cent of women in decision-making structures by the year 2005; promote women's access to productive resources; reform all laws and amend constitutions and practices that discriminated against women; enhance men's and women's access to quality education and health care services; protect and promote the human rights of women and children; and take urgent measures to prevent violence against women and children.

96. The activities of the preceding year had indicated clearly that there was a political will on the part of the member States of SADC to implement the Platform for Action, which must become an integral part of national and regional socio-economic development strategies. That would require planning, organizing and financing activities at every level, establishing the necessary legal basis, mobilizing the public and private sectors and participating in international technical assistance programmes.

97. Concerning the implementation of the conclusions of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the member States of SADC remained convinced that the United Nations system had a crucial role to play and were concerned that resources allocated for that purpose were inadequate.

98. Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system, in accordance with the agreed conclusions adopted by the Economic and Social Council in July 1997 should facilitate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

99. That was, however, a means and not an end, and did not replace the need for policies, programmes and legislation in favour of women; gender units and focal points remained necessary.

100. The member States of SADC had reservations about a coordinated approach to gender mainstreaming, since that coordination could overshadow mainstreaming itself, and considered that the Secretary-General must be held

accountable for gender mainstreaming throughout the United Nations system.

101. Action must be taken on the recommendations of the Economic and Social Council before the year 2000, when implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action would be reviewed. The General Assembly must remind all its committees and bodies that gender mainstreaming was important in all areas and activities. The member States of SADC welcomed the steps taken by the Economic and Social Council to better harmonize and coordinate its efforts in that area. They also welcomed the Secretary-General's commitment to mainstreaming. Gender issues must be given a higher profile at the level of the Executive Committees, and the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women should be a member of those committees. The role of the focal points for women in the field and at headquarters must also be strengthened.

102. Gender balance was a goal which must be realized as quickly as possible and SADC agreed that the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women should be provided with statistics on the presence of women throughout the United Nations system. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the International Civil Service Commission should monitor progress towards gender balance. While regretting the difficulties that United Nations reform would cause for many staff members, her delegation urged the Secretary-General to take advantage of the restructuring to promote gender balance.

103. Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was an opportunity to create viable partnerships between national Governments and the international community. The United Nations must continue to raise awareness of gender issues worldwide. Gender equality was a fundamental right at the heart of the development process and must not remain a mere illusion.

104. **Mr. Rogov** (Russian Federation) said that although for a long time women's issues had not been a priority, that situation had changed since the Vienna and Beijing Conferences, which had proclaimed that women were an integral part of society and confirmed the international community's determination to achieve the goals of equality and development for women in the interests of all. It was therefore essential to implement without delay the decisions adopted by those conferences at the national, regional and international levels.

105. Reforms undertaken in Russia had opened new avenues for improving the status of women. The abandonment of a planned economic system had facilitated the emancipation of women and their participation in all activities, on an equal footing with men. The development of a market economy and the holding of free elections had opened the world of business and politics to them. A free press had led to a national debate on the problems faced by Russian women. Russian non-governmental organizations, some of them having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and playing an important role at the international level, had become an integral part of civil society.

106. However, the period of transition which the country was experiencing did pose some difficulties for Russian women: that was why international cooperation for the countries in transition as they implemented the Platform for Action needed to be strengthened, in accordance with the Beijing Declaration. In complying with the provisions of the Platform for Action, his Government had adopted a national action plan for improving the status of women by the year 2000. An independent commission had been established to ensure the implementation of the Platform for Action. A Presidential decree aimed at increasing the participation of women at all levels of the administration had been issued. In addition, in accordance with the recommendations of the Conference, legislative measures had been adopted to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women.

107. Following a recent restructuring, the Government had adopted a more social orientation, which was more favourable to women. The First Vice-President of the Russian Federation, responsible for social affairs, had been appointed Chairman of the Inter-Departmental Commission for the Advancement of Women. In addition, the Minister of Culture and the Deputy Minister of Health were women, as was the Deputy Minister of Labour and Development, who was also responsible for questions related to women, children, and the family in general.

108. The Subregional Conference in Bucharest, which had gathered together high-level government experts from central and eastern Europe as well as the Commonwealth of Independent States, had given new impetus to the advancement of women in the countries in transition. In 1997, the international community as a whole had begun to pay particular attention to the question of the participation of women in political life and decision-taking. In February, the Inter-Parliamentary Union had held a conference in New Delhi on the theme of partnerships between men and women in the political sphere, while a seminar on the role of women in society organized in Warsaw by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe would end within a few days.

109. His delegation welcomed the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-first session concerning the participation of women in decision-taking. It also welcomed the practical turn taken by the work of the Commission, and the establishment of a working group responsible for drafting the text of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. It also took note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/281), in particular the conclusions contained therein, which referred to the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the adoption of gender mainstreaming, by the three-tiered intergovernmental mechanisms, the Secretariat and other bodies of the United Nations system.

110. Lastly, the agreed conclusions adopted by the Economic and Social Council concerning gender mainstreaming in all United Nations strategies and programmes would contribute to the realization of the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action and ensure that, by the end of the century, gender equality would be achieved throughout the world, for the greater good of humanity.

The meeting rose at 12:45 p.m.